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ABSTRACT

The writing and production of classroom publications can become a strong motivating factor in stimulating children to read. Since a wide variety of activities is necessary in compiling a class paper or magazine, all children can be involved. Guidelines should be established and followed concerning titles and themes for the publication, duties of staff members, content, the assignment of writing, proofreading, ads, the scope of the material, format, illustrations, the production process, and distribution. Children's silent and oral reading skills will be strengthened in the process of producing the publication, and they will be eager to read the finished product. (JM)

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MOTIVATING READING THROUGH CLASSROOM PUBLICATIONS

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All was quiet except for the rustle of turning pages as the group of intermediate grade children were intently reading. "Talk about reading motivation!" exclaimed the teacher.

Reading had not been so enthusiastically pursued by everyone in the class before. What was the motivating ingredient?

These children were reading their own magazine that they had planned, written, and published about animals, a favorite topic of this group. They had collected newspaper articles about animals and read information about animals. Each person produced his own ditto master (some using as many as five colors) with his story and a picture. Now that the magazine was published, each child could read what he had written and what his friends had written.

Motivation for reading is intrinsic in classroom publications of magazines and newspapers because material is written by the child reader or his peers, content is relevant to the child's experiences, and language is the style he uses. Everyone likes to see his name in print or something he has written published, and children are no exception. Publications thus go one step beyond the motivation inherent in the language-experience approach because the child's writing is preserved in a more enduring form.

Not only will the child write about his own experiences but he will

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be exposed to various forms of creative writing that will appear in the class magazine. For example, if the group decides to publish Haiku Happenings, that's a pretty good reason to become familiar with this type of poetry. In the case of newspapers, he will learn techniques for producing the varied forms of content in this type of publication. In the process, development and improvement of writing skills will be done in a natural setting and for a reason.

Above all are the values to the child related to self-concept enhancement, promotion of creativity, development of a free time pursuit, and aquisition and practical use of research skills necessary for some forms of writing.

One fifth grade boy, for example, was not too popular with his peers prior to his work on the class newspaper. At that point, he became interested in making up fictitious ads and showed a flair for this type of writing. As a result he became advertising manager when the class opened a school store, and his school work, attitude, and popularity showed marked improvement.

GUIDELINES FOR PUBLICATION

Suggestions for motivating interest in publishing include the following: visit a local newspaper or print shop, study the newspaper and produce one as a culminating activity, or look at publications done by other children. One teacher sparked interest by making up a newspaper herself that related to class activities and contained reference to all the children. Instead of a name, a series of question marks appeared

across the top of the front page. Pupils were invited to name the class paper and write one of their own. They proceeded to do so that very day!

Themes for publications vary. They can be related to the season, a specific holiday, or correlated with some content or interest area. They can be true or fictional. The time can be today, historic, or futuristic and even written as if the authors were living in the era described. One class, for example, published a newspaper relative to the town's centennial and written as if it were produced one hundred years ago. Children even rubbed yellow chalk around the edges to make it look old. Town newspaper files were researched and long-time citizens interviewed. The feature story revealed that there were not enough citizens to qualify for incorporation, so some enterprising person copied names off tombstones in the local cemetary.

Publication names should be chosen by the class. Since names on newspapers usually appear at the top of the first page, space limitations mean the name will have to be short. Magazines, on the other hand, often have a cover and consequently can have longer titles. Children should be encouraged to be creative in naming publications. Such names might be: Smith's Special (after name of school or teacher), Cave Man Chronicle, Tales from the Haunted House, Poetry Parade, Moon Tune, Dinosaur Diggings, or April Fooler. Publication themes usually suggest possible titles.

As many children as possible should be on the staff, especially in the case of newspapers, since the child's name will thereby appear in print. Some groups manage to include everyone by developing an extensive list of positions, such as Illustrations and Assistant Illustrations.

Content needs to be determined. Magazine content should relate to a central theme. This might mean all one type of writing, such as haiku, tall tales, or mystery stories. Or, the type will be varied but themes related, such as stories, poems, riddles, etc. about St. Patrick's Day, winter, or All About Me.

Newspaper content can be suggested by examining a commercial paper or just having children suggest what they want to include. Typical content involves: news story or stories, sports, interviews, roving reporter, weather, editorial, advice column, reviews of books, movies, records or TV programs, letters to the editor, and advertisements. Content will probably vary according to grade level. Older children, for example, might relate more to automobiles, fashions, or popular musical groups.

Writing of any one piece of material can be done by individuals, groups, or the entire class. At any rate, a deadline should be established and maintained. It's true that some students do not assume responsibility in this regard. However, once their contribution has been omitted because it was late, these children are often the ones who want to know when the next publication is coming out.

Opinion differs in regard to correction of material. Should it be edited or published as written? Most teachers do stress proofreading by the writer and corrections when necessary for readability. Standards expected by the school and grade level are usually imposed. It is better if editing can be done in consultation with the writer so he can see how mechanics studied in class are applied and useful. Some

censorship may even be necessary if material is in poor taste (these publications do go home) or dangerous. One writer of an advice column, for example, received an inquiry about what to do regarding an annoying brother. The columnist's first suggestion was to hit him over the head!

In regard to newspapers, children above the primary level can be instructed in techniques for writing various content. For example, a news story should tell the important information first by answering who, what, when, where, and why. Writers should use short sentences and avoid giving their opinion. An editorial should state the problem or situation and give suggestions for a solution.

Ads can be realistic, such as Open House publicity, a coming assembly, the school store, or lost and found. On the other hand, fictional ads can be amusing. Children can make up a product, such as Ultra Blight toothpaste, Sugar Hops cereal, Glue hair spray, or Gurgle baby food. Another idea is to base ads on propaganda techniques such as bandwagon, testimonials, and generalizations. Such ads might read: "Are you the only student in class who doesn't have an Answer-Right pen?" "Cinderella uses an Answer-Right pen," or "Get to the top of the class with an Answer-Right pen."

Material should not be limited to school situations. Some schools may have little sports news, for example, so this section may include out-of-school interests. Editorials can be based on issues not originating in school but about which children have concern.

After material has been collected, the publication process comes next. Very few schools below the high school level have print shops, so other

forms of duplicating are necessary, depending on how many copies are needed. The most popular process is ditto since it is available in most schools and is easy to use. Ditto masters come in several colors and thus add attractiveness to each page.

If the publication is typed, it can be done by the teacher, school secretary, parents, or students, depending on their skill. Try to avoid the situation created when a boy in one class volunteered to type at home. The result was a disaster. Then he confessed that all he had was a toy typewriter!

Lengthy magazines should have a cover, title page (containing name and location of school, class grade level, teacher and staff names, etc.) and table of contents. Newspapers look better if they have a border line around the outside of each page. This keeps the reader's eye from running off the page and also keeps the typist from doing the same. Lines can also be drawn between stories.

Pictures are a must for attractiveness and to break up the monotony of too much writing. Children who do not turn in written contributions can still be part of the staff through their illustrations. Overlays provide a variation. In this technique a picture is drawn in one color and then the writing appears over it in another color.

Perhaps the most personal aspect of publication comes when the children share in the production process. That is, a group of class secretaries produce the ditto masters or each child does his own ditto. True, the product will not win any prizes, but the children will live a never forgotten experience. If this is done, the class needs specific

instruction in procedures. Some children forget to remove the protective paper between the cover and carbon and others think that if they make a mistake on the cover, all they have to do is erase it. One child thought that everything came out backwards, so he drew the American flag in reverse.

If the publication is written, it is best done in manuscript, since this resembles print in commercial publications. Handwriting guidelines for alignment purposes can be drawn with the carbon removed.

After the publication is "printed," children can collate, staple, and distribute. Administrators and other teachers (at least those on the same grade level as the class publishing) should receive a copy. Some groups even send copies to the Superintendent of Schools.

READING SKILLS

Not only will children want to read their publications, but the reading and writing processes help develop skills of silent and oral reading.

Silent reading is more fluent because word recognition difficulties are reduced since vocabulary is on the child's experience level. Sentences are structured in familiar patterns.

Comprehension and interpretation skills are promoted in the writing and reading process. Examples are:

Getting the main idea -- headlines and titles, opening paragraphs of news stories

Making judgements -- editorials, advertisements, columns, reviews

Identifying character traits -- interviews, stories, reviews

Promoting creative thinking -- all forms of creative writing, advertisements, illustrations

Distinguishing fact from opinion -- news stories, editorials, advice column, reviews, factual stories

Sequence -- news stories, creative writing, directions

In writing based on research, authors may read from various sources, select relevant information, use supporting details, perceive cause-effect relationships, sequence, comparison and contrast, and draw conclusions. Basing publications on content areas such as social studies and science will lead to such research.

One sixth grade class, for example, published Greek Times. Articles related to Socrates, Poseidon, customs, gods, olympic games, fashions, and entertainment.

The reader not only uses and develops comprehension and word recognition skills but study skills such as skimming and locating information are necessary. Tables of content, headlines, and pictures are useful here.

Publications provide natural oral reading situations. There is a purpose for reading -- to share, inform, and entertain. Since material is familiar because it was self-authored and not copied, the reading is more likely to be fluent and expressive. Some children share their writing with other classrooms, especially on the primary level. Audience interest will be high because they know the author.

One group of boys, for example, wrote a play called "Santa's Magic Pool Table" for their class publication, Zippy, Zappy Noel Anthology. The play was impossible to stage but made a good audience reading situation by the authors. The staging difficulty was due to the plot. Santa received

a pool table from Marvel the Magician who neglected to tell him that every time he said "Nine," the table would disappear. It would reappear when Santa laughed, "Ho, ho, ho!" Naturally, the table keeps popping in and out during the play.

In conclusion, classroom publications can motivate reading because they are a new experience for many children. Very little has been done in this area in most classrooms. The potential is unreached as yet. One child summed up her experiences working on publications by stating, "We learned a lot of new things. We learned that reading is fun."